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ABSTRACT

This newsletter summarizes the work of a committee, set up by the Ministry of Education, which sought to define the objectives and the methods of student evaluation and to draw up a proposal for reforming and standardizing student evaluation in the comprehensive and the secondary school. Deficiencies of current methods of student evaluation are discussed. General objectives for evaluation in relation to the objectives of educational policy and the objectives of general social policy are examined. Three evaluation models which include the predictive function of evaluation are described. The newsletter also presents the committee's performance assessment model (pass-fail grading) which presupposes specified goals. Reforms of the marking scale for grades reports are recommended and a plan for implementation of reforms in evaluation of students is suggested. (Author/SHM)

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Institute for Educational Research
University of Jyväskylä
40100 Jyväskylä 10, Finland

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The Report of the Committee on the Reform of Student Evaluation

THE TASKS OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE REFORM OF STUDENT EVALUATION

In March 1971 the Finnish Ministry of Education set up a committee whose task it was to define 1) the objectives and 2) the methods of student evaluation and to draw up a proposal for reforming and standardizing student evaluation in 3) the comprehensive and 4) the secondary school. The committee under the chairmanship of professor Juhani Karvonen is called "the Committee on the Reform of Student Evaluation". A summary of the committee's work completed in April 1973 is presented below.

THE DEFICIENCIES OF CURRENT STUDENT EVALUATION

First the committee examined the current system of student assessment in various types of school. The committee found that the current student evaluation system has a great many drawbacks. Current evaluation methods are in many respects not sufficiently objective. Teachers' ideas of the assessment criteria differ and the varied use of the marking scale reduces the comparability of marks even when assessment is made using otherwise the same criteria. Current testing procedures on which student evaluation is based, do not properly fulfil the measurement requirements set for assessment methods. The pedagogical impact of current student evaluation is also questionable in many respects, because often it does not give the student enough information on

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his own learning. Furthermore, current methods serve the objectives of educational equality only in a small degree.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES SET UP FOR THE EVALUATION

The report examines the general objectives of evaluation in relation to the objectives of educational policy and the objectives of general social policy. The committee has analysed the objectives at three levels.

1) Firstly the committee has examined the objectives of educational policy, which are derived from the socio-political concept of improving the quality of life. The objective is an individual who is capable of democratic participation and desirous of it.

2) Secondly the objective of educational equality has been analysed. The committee presents three different viewpoints from which educational equality or the degree of educational democracy can be assessed:

- the first one is called "equality of access to education"
- the second one is "equality of educational treatment"
- and the most recent definition is "equality of educational outcomes"

3) Thirdly the committee has considered the pedagogical objectives of evaluation, i.e. the demands that curriculum development, the planning of teaching,and the student as an independent and creative individual make on evaluation carried out at school. The formation of a realistic self-image and the independently formed concept of society are seen as the main objectives of evaluation work. The objectives are best achieved by creating opportunities for the student to evaluate his own action independently.

THE FUNCTIONS OF STUDENT EVALUATION

The committee considers "goal evaluation" to be the solution to the problem of criteria in evaluation, which means comparing performance with the learning objectives set up beforehand. According to the committee student evaluation should have a diagnostic, motivating, guiding and predictive function.

In the proposal for reforming student evaluation in the comprehensive school the committee considers it important that the emphasis should be shifted from current predictive evaluation to guiding evaluation, but it thinks, however, that for the time being school evaluation also involves supplying predictive information for receiving schools and employers. The committee therefore proposes three evaluation models, in which this predictive function of evaluation has been taken into account. In the models an attempt is made to reduce the number of reports which contain marks on a numerical scale consisting of several points and to increase guiding evaluation in the form of verbal notices. These models call for several changes in the current system. The change-over to a "modified current model" can take place with smaller alterations and according to this model the students are given a report at the end of each term and the grade reports are completed with verbal notices. In the revised predictive models an attempt is made to reduce predictive evaluation at those class levels where it is not necessary to give predictive information. In the most advanced predictive model the first report which contains marks (a numerical scale) is not given until the end of the autumn term of the sixth form. This point of time has been chosen so that students and their parents would have some grounds on which to choose courses and subjects at the senior level. At class levels where grade reports are not given they are replaced by verbal notices. Before the beginning of school a initial diagnosis is made of each student.

THE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT MODEL

The committee also presents a "performance assessment model" (pass-fail grading) which presupposes specified goals, so it cannot yet at present be realised very far. In the model the emphasis is on the motivating and guiding function of evaluation. The student is given a so called performance assessment report at the end of comprehensive school or when he leaves school. At the end of other terms a verbal report is given showing what kind of objectives the student has achieved during the term.

The committee considers that in the reform of student evaluation an change-over should be made directly to the most advanced predictive model, unless some special circumstances make it unpractical. On the other hand, changes

can also be realized gradually. Only when the objectives of the curriculum have been made concrete enough and the selection methods at higher educational levels and in working life have been appropriately developed, should a change-over to the performance assessment model take place.

THE REFORMING OF THE MARKING SCALE

In giving grade reports the committee recommends a marking scale of 1 - 5, which represents all acceptable performance levels in the comprehensive school. By means of teaching and appropriate goal definitions it should be possible that no performances occur which are classified as unacceptable. The committee suggests that the scale 1 - 5 be used for acceptable performances also in secondary schools, but grade reports could also include unacceptable performances. In the reforming of the marking scale the committee has also aimed at a solution which is in accord with the Swedish marking scale so that the heavy migration between the two countries would not cause problems in this respect. Furthermore, the committee does not support the idea of grade repetition or conditional promotion in the comprehensive school, although students should be given a right to it. According to the committee numerical evaluation should be retained at most levels at least for the time being. It is however, a matter for consideration whether some subjects rather than others might not be evaluated numerically, although the committee did not make suggestions for subjects in which graded marks (on the 5-point scale) or performance assessments (i.e. pass-fail) should be given.

THE IMPROVING OF EVALUATIONS

Because the report is of great significance for the student's future the committee considers that assessments have to be based on reliable and controlable observations made during a longer period. The committee also finds it necessary that the evaluation should be comparable in different schools, and reliability and objectivity should be increased. Comparability can be improved by standardized tests. In addition to these other carefully prepared "common

tests" are also needed. School readiness tests are needed in the initial diagnosis. According to the committee formative evaluation is the core of evaluation carried out in the comprehensive school and also for this purpose appropriate tests are needed. In teaching special attention should be paid to learning difficulties. The diagnosis of difficulties concerns primarily those who by means of formative evaluation have been found to have difficulties in reaching the goals. Possible ways of overcoming difficulties are e.g. individual teaching, remedial instruction or special instruction. In the committee's opinion teachers' skills in guidance should be improved.

The committee's viewpoint is that the predictive evaluation models can gradually be abandoned and a change-over to concrete and informative feedback and use of performance assessment can be made. This, however, presupposes the specification of learning objectives and development of selection tests. Since there should be a change from comparative numerical assessment to guiding verbal information in student evaluation, special attention has to be paid to the development of methods of information and feedback. According to the committee the methods of information can be divided into unofficial i.e. discussions and other contacts, and official which include numerical reports and verbal notices which complete or replace them. From the point of view of the implementation of evaluation reforms it is also necessary to intensify both teachers' basic and further training.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFORM

According to the committee the development of evaluation is closely related to curriculum development in general and it should be taken into account in the overall plan. The expertise of all administrative levels has to utilized. The Ministry of Education should make out an overall policy for curriculum planning and define the place of evaluation in it. The task of making out a detailed development programme for the evaluation work should be assigned to the National Board of Education. The regional school inspectors are responsible for the direction and inspection of the curriculum implementation at county level and the implementation of actual reforms is seen to by education officers and secretaries as well as supervising teachers at community level. Because evaluation is carried out by teachers, they should have at their disposal enough

background information and aids. The committee stresses that evaluation is student-centred action and that the student has to learn to carry out evaluation of his own work independently. Therefore also the student should have the opportunity to participate continuously in the development of evaluation.

It would be the duty of research institutes to take care of investigations concerning education, continuous evaluation of curricula, development of evaluation methods and documentation and information services. The Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, at present already performs these tasks except for the production of teaching material. The operation of its Evaluation Department should be developed further so that the institute could take care of the planning of national standardised tests and other measuring instruments. Also the work of teacher training units should be fitted into national curriculum development work.